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SUBJECT: KUWAIT SCENE SETTER FOR SCIENCE ENVOY DR. ZERHOUNI

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[1](#)1. (SBU) Ambassador and Mission Kuwait warmly welcome the February 17-18 visit of Science Envoy Elias Zerhouni. Meetings have been requested with the following officials: H.E. Dr. Hilal Al-Sayer, the Minister of Health; Dr. Naji Al-Mutairi, the Director General for the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR); Dr. Ali Al-Shamlan, the Director General for the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS); Dr. Abdul Rahman Al-Awadi, the Executive Secretary for the Regional Organization for the Protection of the Marine Environment (ROPME) and Dr. Kazem Behbehani, the Director General for the Dasman Institute for Research.

Kuwait Snapshot

[1](#)2. (SBU) Kuwait is a Gulf emirate whose small size (about the size of New Jersey) and population (approximately 1.1 million Kuwaiti citizens and 2.3 million expatriates) belie its geostrategic importance. Politically, Kuwait is a constitutional emirate with a freely-elected parliament (including four women MPs, all U.S. PhD holders) and is home to one of the freest medias in the region; many Kuwaitis, and particularly the Kuwaiti elite, have studied or traveled to the United States and visa numbers, after a post 9/11 period of decline, are again on the rise. Our strong bilateral relationship is founded upon close security ties that have endured since the 1991 liberation of Kuwait from Iraq, and are manifested today in Kuwait serving as a key military training and logistical support hub. A major exporter of both capital (over USD 34 billion in outward FDI over the past five years) and oil (with the fifth largest proven oil resources in the world), Kuwait also punches above its weight economically.

Indigenous Scientific Expertise

[1](#)3. (SBU) Kuwait's scientific research history started relatively early, with the founding of Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR) in 1967 as part of the Arabian Oil Company's responsibility in exchange for its oil concession. The Regional Organization for the Protection of Marine Environment (ROPME) was established in 1973 to host inter-governmental meetings of the GCC states to protect the environment and collaborate with the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP). The Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Science (KFAS) was founded in 1976 and receives a mandatory contribution from Kuwaiti shareholding companies of one percent of net profit, which it uses to fund research in basic and applied sciences. In recent years, both Kuwaiti scientific dynamism and U.S. Kuwaiti cooperation appear to have tapered off somewhat, though KFAS has a strong research relationship with the Massachusetts Institute for

Technology (MIT), which is manifested in the Kuwait-MIT Center for Natural Resources and the Environment. Over the past few months, however, KISR officials have expressed their interest in re-energizing that cooperation, especially in the area of renewable energy.

Shared Interests: Renewable Energy, Energy Efficiency and Nuclear Power

14. (SBU) Kuwaiti officials have expressed interest in renewable energy and energy efficiency cooperation to address Kuwait's growing power demand, projected to increase at a rate of 6% to 8% per year (ref A). Dr. Naji Al-Mutairi, KISR's Director General has said that he hopes Kuwait will generate at least 10% of Kuwait's power from renewable energy by 2020, and has outlined a plan to evaluate wind and solar power as options. KISR is currently evaluating a proposal by the U.S. National Renewable Energy Lab, but is concerned about the cost. For its part, the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation is in the initial phases of evaluating carbon capture technology as a commercially viable reservoir management tool, which would both reduce CO2 emissions and enhance Kuwait's oil recovery. Despite these initiatives, however, we understand that Kuwait, following GCC consensus, does not plan to associate itself with the Copenhagen Accord.

15. (SBU) Kuwait has set up a committee, headed by the Prime Minister, to examine the potential for developing peaceful nuclear power. The Kuwaitis are taking a very careful approach to evaluating the siting and economic needs for a nuclear power plant and the human resources that would be required to regulate and run a nuclear power program. Even if Kuwait decided not to develop its own domestic capability, the steps would be important for any GCC nuclear power projects.

GoK-USG Planning First-Ever Arab Region Frontiers of Science Program

16. (SBU) The National Academies of Science, Engineering and Medicine is currently planning a co-sponsored symposium with KISR and KFAS to present the first-ever Arab Region Frontiers of Science Program (ref B). The Frontiers Program has an interdisciplinary approach that challenges young leaders from the scientific and engineering world to forge partnerships. The National Academies, KISR and KFAS are planning the first event in a five-year program commitment for December 2010.

Kuwait's Challenges: Environment and Health

17. (SBU) Kuwait grapples with environmental challenges, including water, air and oil pollution. Almost all water is desalinated from the Arabian Gulf, meaning that ensuring a dependable water supply and controlling marine pollution go hand in hand. Marine pollution is a major concern, caused by ocean dumping, oil spills, and the existence of untreated sewage in the Gulf. Air pollution comes from automobiles, oil sector facilities and power plants fueled by high-sulfur fuel oil. Kuwait's petroleum sector contributes to air pollution through refinery emissions and marine pollution through leaks at refining and export facilities. The clean-up of remaining oil lakes left over from Iraq's ignition of oil wells in 1991 was slated to begin in 2009 under a 10-year UN program, but this has not yet happened.

Healthcare -- Obesity and Diabetes: Twin Epidemics in Kuwait

18. (SBU) Arguably, Kuwait is not getting full value from its healthcare system. In a country where the government funds many patients to travel overseas for treatment, the GoK has not built a new public hospital in over 20 years. Although there are currently plans for new hospital construction, tendering rules are likely to delay implementation.

19. (SBU) Obesity and diabetes are considered to be growing health concerns in the country. With an estimated 75% of the population clinically obese and childhood obesity on the rise, Kuwait has the highest level of obesity in the world, according to the American Public Health Association. Additionally, diabetes was found to be the fastest growing disease in Kuwait. The World Health Organizations states that 26% of the Kuwaiti population has diabetes. To combat the disease, Kuwait set up the Dasman Center for Research and Treatment of Diabetes to be the largest research and treatment center in the Middle East. The center went through some major "growing pains" and was clearly not fulfilling its mission. It is currently undergoing restructuring and the new director is working with Harvard and the Joslin Diabetes Center to develop a more credible program.

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